

# Occupational Profile: Physical Therapists

By Betty Leishman

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS) Career Guide to Industries, the health care industry was the largest employing industry in the U.S. in 2004. The BLS also states that eight out of 20 occupations projected to grow the fastest are in the health care field.

In our last Trends Occupational Profile we profiled medical assistants as being one of the fastest growing occupations in the health care industry. Another fast growing occupation in this industry is that of physical therapists. The projected growth from the 2002–2012 employment projections for this occupation is HOT! According to the BLS, growth in the number of people with disabilities or limited functioning will increase the demand for therapy services. Acute hospital, rehabilitation and orthopedic settings will provide good job opportunities for physical therapists. Currently nearly 60% of the physical therapists work in hospitals or in physical therapy offices.

Statewide the projections show 38 openings yearly. Omaha will have 12 openings and Lincoln will have 11 openings for physical therapists per year.

Projected Openings for Physical Therapists in Nebraska 2004–2014 Projections			
Area	Growth Rate	Annual Openings	Job Prospects
Nebraska	27.45%	38	Hot
Non-metro Region	31.11%	18	Hot
Omaha Consortium	22.16%	12	Hot
Lincoln MSA	29.85%	11	Hot
Southeast Region	47.62%	4	Hot
Central Region	26.97%	6	Hot
Mid Plains Region	33.33%	1	Hot
Panhandle Region	18.18%	1	Cold
Northeast Region	34.01%	6	Hot
Metro Region	24.84%	21	Hot

Physical therapists can be found in several industries in Nebraska—currently over 96% of them are employed in Health Services. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics almost six out of ten physical therapists work in hospitals or physical therapists' offices on a nationwide basis. Others were employed in doctor's offices, adult day care, schools and home health care agencies.

## Occupation Description

Along with providing services that help improve mobility, relieve pain and help restore functions, physical therapists also try to prevent or limit permanent physical disabilities of patients who have injuries or diseases. Physical therapists patients include: accident victims, people who are experiencing low back pain, arthritis, heart disease, head injuries and cerebral palsy.

Physical therapists test and measure their patients' strength, range of motion, coordination, muscle performance and motor skills along with other patients' abilities. Physical therapists also help determine whether the patient can be independent in the community and the workplace after an injury or illness.

Physical therapists also develop treatment plans for their patients. These plans describe treatments, their purpose and expected outcomes and can be performed by physical therapy assistants and physical therapy aides under the supervision of a physical therapist.

Most likely treatments will include exercises as physical therapists encourage their patients to use their own muscles to help their flexibility and range of motion. Their main goal is to improve how these patients function at their work and homes.

Consulting and practicing with physicians, dentists, nurses, and occupational therapists is also a big part of a physical therapist's job. They may also work with audiologists, speech pathologists and social workers.

Some of the areas a physical therapist may specialize in are: pediatrics, geriatrics, orthopedics, sports medicine, and neurology.

### Skills Needed

According to O\*NET online (<http://online.onetcenter.org>), some of the general skills needed to be an effective physical therapist include:

Active listening – Giving full attention to what other people are saying

Instructing – Teaching others

Time Management – Ability to manage one's time effectively

Speaking – Conveying information effectively

Critical Thinking – Using logic and reasoning to identify different approaches to problems

Learning Strategies – Using appropriate training methods and procedures while learning or teaching

Science – Solving problems with scientific rules and methods

Active Learning – Understanding the implications of new information for problem solving and decision making

Monitoring – Assessing personal, organizational or individual performance to make improvements or take corrective action

Reading Comprehension – Ability to understand written sentences and paragraphs

Service Orientation – Seeking ways to help people

### Work Styles

The following work styles (personal characteristics that can affect how well someone does a job) are recommended by O\*NET:

Concern for others – Sensitive to others' needs and feelings

Integrity – Honest and ethical

Cooperation – Pleasant with others, being good-natured, cooperative attitude

Dependability – Being reliable, responsible, and fulfilling obligations

Self control – Maintain composure, keep emotions in check, control anger, avoid aggressive behavior even in difficult situations

Independence – Depending on oneself to get things done with little or no supervision

Adaptability/Flexibility – Being open to change and variety in the workplace

Social Orientation – Working well with others

Initiative – Willingness to take on responsibilities and challenges

Leadership – Willingness to lead, take charge, give direction

### Wages for Physical Therapists in Nebraska and Adjacent States

The mid plains has the highest wages, followed by the central region and both are higher than the statewide average. Lincoln is the closest to the statewide average and Omaha and panhandle region wages are not publishable.

#### Nebraska wages:\*

September 2006 estimates:

Area	Average Hourly	Average Annual	Entry Wage	Experienced Wage
Nebraska	\$31.10	\$64,720	\$23.85	\$34.75
Omaha	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Lincoln	\$31.15	\$64,780	\$23.65	\$34.90
Southeast	\$29.45	\$61,275	\$25.30	\$31.55
Central	\$33.85	\$70,450	\$27.35	\$37.15
MidPlains	\$38.10	\$79,250	\$30.75	\$41.80
Panhandle	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Northeast	\$32.30	\$67,195	\$23.45	\$36.75
Metro	\$29.95	\$62,255	\$23.45	\$33.15
Non-Metro	\$32.85	\$68,280	\$25.00	\$36.75

Average wages in adjacent states:

	Colorado	Iowa	Kansas	Missouri	So Dakota	Wyoming
Hourly	\$26.16	\$28.01	\$27.71	\$27.20	\$27.75	\$28.62
Annually	\$54,420	\$58,250	\$57,630	\$56,580	\$57,720	\$59,530

Nebraska's average wages for physical therapists are higher than any of the adjacent states. The highest paying state is Wyoming, followed by Iowa. Colorado pays the lowest average wage.

Note: Please keep in mind that no individual is 'average'. Nebraska Workforce Development produces wage estimates by region at the 10th, 25th, 50th, 75th and 90th percentiles. The 50th percentile is the mid-point where 50 percent of the employment is below this wage and 50 percent is above. The average of the first third is the average of the lowest third of reported wages and may be appropriate for an 'entry' wage. The average of the upper two thirds is the average wage of the upper two thirds of the reported wages and may be appropriate to use as 'experienced' wages. The average (mean) wage is the estimated total wage for an occupation divided by its weighted employment. For more information on these wage definitions, please go to <http://www.NebraskaWorkforce.com>, Labor Market Information, Wages/Cost of Living, Wage Estimates, Methodology.

### Training and Education

A bachelor's degree is the minimum formal education required for this occupation however, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the most common education level for physical therapists is a master's degree.

After graduating from an accredited program, physical therapists are required to pass a licensure exam in all states before they can practice. The programs start with basic science: biology, chemistry, physics and then more specialized courses: biomechanics, neuroanatomy, exam techniques and other procedures. Courses that are useful to have when applying for a physical therapist program are: anatomy, biology, chemistry, math and physics. Some programs require that the student have volunteer experience in a hospital or clinic.

Physical therapists will not only be dealing with patients, in some cases they will be dealing with the patients' families. Therefore they will need strong interpersonal skills, have a desire to help patients, and be compassionate.

A number of states require continuing education (participation in continuing education courses and workshops) in order for a physical therapist to maintain their licensure.

Nebraska training providers for physical therapists include:

\*Note: Check with the school for the most current information.

**Bellevue University**

1000 Galvin Road South  
Bellevue, NE 68005  
Phone: 402.293.3778  
<http://www.bellevue.edu>

**Concordia University**

800 North Columbia  
Seward, NE 68434  
Phone: 800.535.5494  
<http://www.cune.edu>

**Midland Lutheran College**

900 North Clarkson Street  
Fremont, NE 68025  
Phone: 800.642.8382  
<http://www.mlc.edu>

**Central Comm College-Grand Island**

3134 West Highway 34  
Grand Island, NE 68802  
Phone: 800.652.9177  
<http://www.cccneb.edu>

**Creighton University**

California Street at 24th  
Omaha, NE 68178  
Phone: 800.282.5835  
<http://www.creighton.edu>

**Nebraska Wesleyan University**

5000 St. Paul Avenue  
Lincoln, NE 68504  
Phone: 800.541.3818  
<http://www.NebrWesleyan.edu>

**Central Comm College-Hastings**

Box 1024  
Hastings, NE 68901  
Phone: 800.742.7872  
<http://www.cccneb.edu>

**Dana College**

2848 College Drive  
Blair, NE 68008  
Phone: 800.444.3262  
Extension: 1  
<http://www.dana.edu>

**Northeast Community College**

801 East Benjamin Avenue  
Norfolk, NE 68702  
Phone: 800.348.9033  
<http://alpha.necc.cc.ne.us>

**Central Comm College-Platte**

Box 1027  
Columbus, NE 68601  
Phone: 800.642.1083  
<http://www.cccneb.edu>

**Doane College**

1014 Boswell  
Crete, NE 68333  
Phone: 800.333.6263  
<http://www.doane.edu>

**Peru State College**

PO Box 10  
Peru, NE 68421  
Phone: 800.742.4412  
<http://www.peru.edu>

**Chadron State College**

1000 Main Street  
Chadron, NE 69337  
Phone: 800chadron  
<http://www.csc.edu>

**Hastings College**

800 North Turner Ave, P.O. Box 269  
Hastings, NE 68901  
Phone: 800.532.7642  
<http://www.hastings.edu>

**Southeast Comm College-Beatrice**

Box 35A  
Beatrice, NE 68310  
Phone: 800.233.5027  
<http://www.college.sccm.cc.ne.us/3a.htm>

**Clarkson College**

101 South 42nd Street  
Omaha, NE 68131  
Phone: 800.647.5500  
<http://www.clarksoncollege.edu>

**McCook Community College**

1205 East Third Street  
McCook, NE 69001  
Phone: 800.658.4348  
<http://164.119.201.253/>

**Union College**

3800 South 48th Street  
Lincoln, NE 68506  
Phone: 800.228.4600  
<http://www.ucollege.edu>

**University of Nebraska at Kearney**  
905 W. 25th  
Kearney, NE 68849  
Phone: 800.532.7639  
<http://www.unk.edu>

**Wayne State College**  
1111 Main Street  
Wayne, NE 68787  
Phone: 800.2289972  
<http://www.wsc.edu>

**University of Nebraska at Omaha**  
60th and Dodge Streets  
Omaha, NE 68182  
Phone: 800.858.8648  
<http://www.unomaha.edu>

**Western Nebraska Community College**  
1601 East 27th  
Scottsbluff, NE 69361  
Phone: 308.635.6010  
<http://hannibal.wncc.cc.ne.us/>

**University of Nebraska Med Center**  
984230 Nebraska Medical Center  
Omaha, NE 68198  
Phone: 800.626.8431  
<http://www.unmc.edu>

**York College**  
1125 East 8th Street  
York, NE 68467  
Phone: 800.950.9675  
<http://www.york.edu>

**University of Nebraska-Lincoln**  
14th and R Streets  
Lincoln, NE 68588  
Phone: 800.742.8800  
<http://www.unl.edu>

The demand for physical therapists should continue to rise. The growth in the number of individuals with disabilities or limited function will keep up the demand for therapy. The growing elderly population receives the most treatment in acute hospital, rehabilitation, and orthopedic settings, so job opportunities should be particularly good in these areas. Medical advances should see a higher number of trauma victims surviving, and this will create additional demand for rehabilitation. More and more employers are seeing the value of evaluating worksites, teaching safe work habits, and promoting exercise programs in order to reduce injuries in the workplace, which could also increase the demand for physical therapists.

**Sources:**

June 2006 wage estimates, OES, NWD-DOL, LMI Center  
Career Compass, NWD-DOL, LMI Center  
Nebraska TrainingLink, NWD-DOL, LMI Center  
America's Career InfoNet [www.acinet.org](http://www.acinet.org)  
O\*NET Online <http://online.onetcenter.org>  
U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics <http://stats.bls.gov>